



LEV TOLSTOI  
STORIES  
FOR  
CHILDREN

The best of Tolstoy's remarkable stories—which children of the world enjoy—are offered in English

Translated from the Russian by *Fainna Glagoleva*



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## THE KITTEN

There were once a brother and a sister named Vasya and Katya, and they had a cat. In the spring the cat disappeared. The children looked for it everywhere, but could not find it.

One day they were playing near the barn and heard the meowing of tiny voices overhead. Vasya climbed the ladder to the hayloft.



Katya stood below and kept asking, "Find them? Did you find them?"

But Vasya did not reply. At last, he shouted, "I found them! It's our cat. And she has kittens. They're so cute. Come up here, quick."

Katya ran home, got some milk and took it back for the cat.

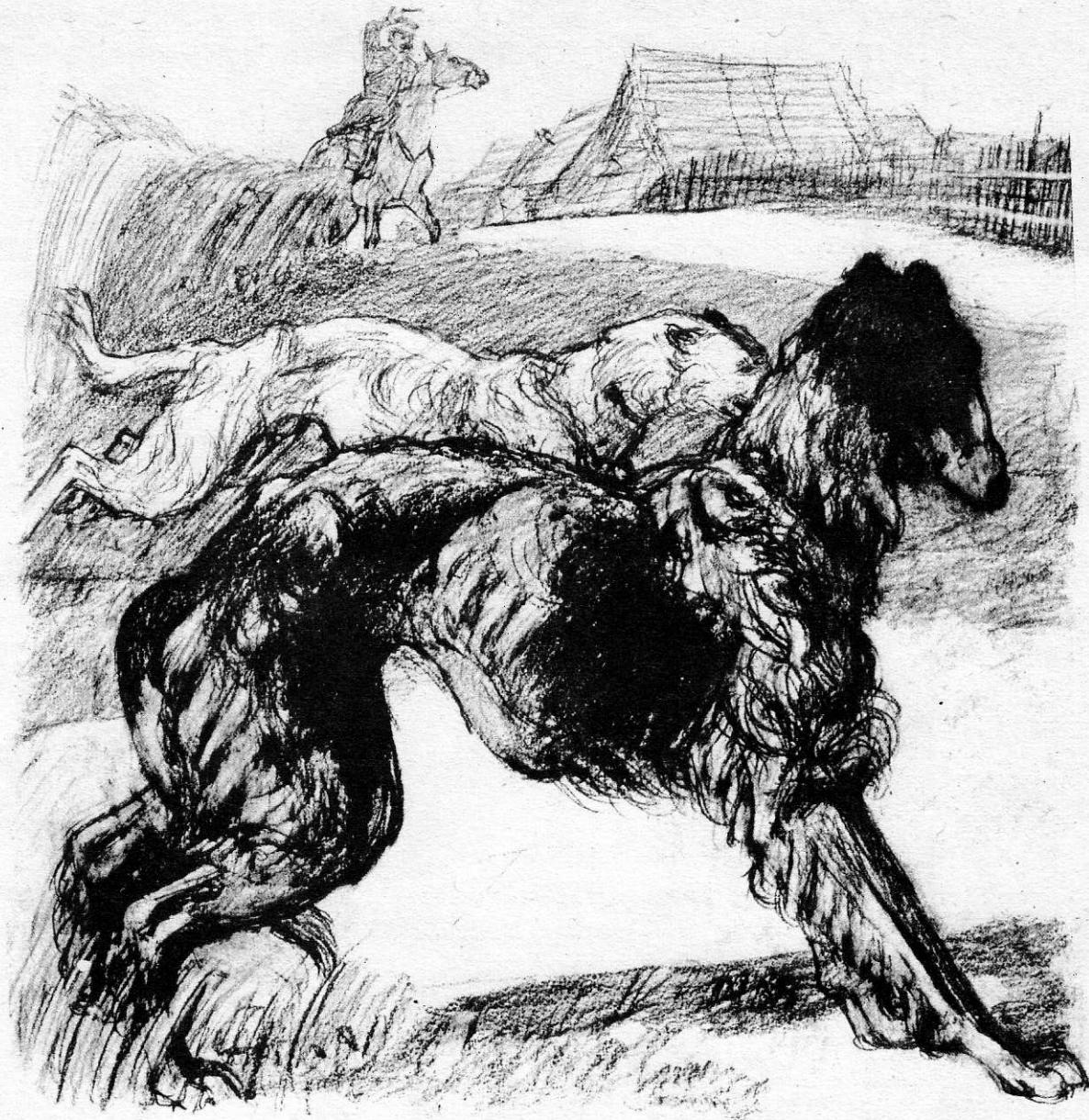
There were five kittens. When they grew a little older and began coming out of the corner where they had been born the children chose one for themselves, a gray kitten with white

paws, and brought it home. Their mother gave away the other kittens, but left this one for the children. The children fed it, played with it and let it sleep on their beds.

One day the children went out to play on the road and took the kitten along.

The wind was blowing bits of straw along the road. The kitten





played with the straw, and the children laughed as they watched it. Then they came upon some sorrel growing by the roadside. They went off to pick it and forgot all about the kitten.

Suddenly they heard someone shouting: "Back! Back!" and saw a hunter riding towards them with his two hounds running on ahead. The dogs had spotted the kitten and wanted to catch it. The silly kitten crouched, arched its back and stared at the dogs instead of running away.



The hounds frightened Katya. She screamed and ran away. But Vasya made a dash for the kitten and reached it just as the hounds did.

The dogs were about to snatch the kitten, but Vasya flopped down on the road and shielded the kitten with his body.

Then the hunter came galloping up and chased off his dogs. Vasya brought the kitten home and never took it out to the fields again.

# THE GIRL AND THE MUSHROOMS

Two girls were returning from the woods with their baskets full of mushrooms.

They had to cross the railroad tracks.

They thought the train was far away, climbed the embankment and began stepping over the rails.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of the locomotive. The elder girl darted back, but the younger one ran on across the rails.

The elder girl shouted to her sister, "Don't turn back!"

But the train was so close and was making so much noise that the younger girl did not hear her. She thought her sister wanted her to run back. She ran back across the rails, tripped, dropped her basket and began gathering up the mushrooms.

The train was now very close. The engineer pulled the whistle as hard as he could.

The elder girl shouted, "Leave the mushrooms!" But the little girl thought she was telling her to gather up the mushrooms and so kept bending over for them.

The engineer could not stop the train in time. The train whistle shrieked, and the train rolled on over the girl.

The elder girl screamed and sobbed. All the passengers looked out of the car windows, while the conductor ran to the far end of the train to see what had happened to the girl.

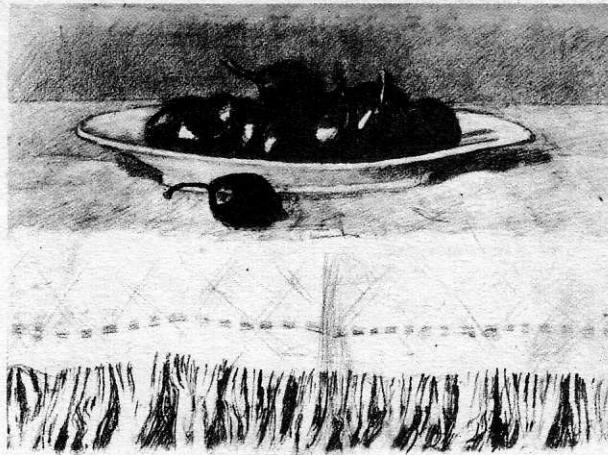




When the train had passed the spot, everyone saw the little girl lying face-down between the rails. She was lying very still.

Then she raised her head, got up on her knees, gathered up her mushrooms and ran back to her sister.





## THE PLUM PIT

Mother bought some plums for the children's dessert. The plums were on a plate. Vanya had never tasted a plum and kept sniffing them. He liked the looks of them very much. He wanted so to try them. He kept walking past the plate. When there was no one in the room, the temptation became too great. He snatched a plum and ate it. Mother counted the plums before dinner and saw that one was missing. She told Father.

At dinner Father said, "Did anyone eat a plum, children?"

They all replied:

"No."

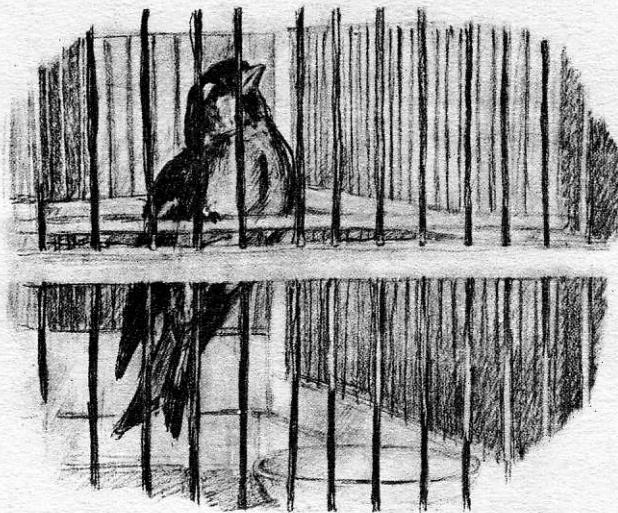
Vanya became as red as a beet. He, too, said, "No, I didn't."

Then Father said, "It was not nice of one of you to have eaten it. But that does not matter now. What does is that there are pits in the plums, and if someone does not know how to eat a plum and swallows the pit, he will die the next day. That is what I am so afraid of."

Vanya turned pale and said, "Oh, I threw the pit out of the window."

Then everyone laughed, but Vanya burst into tears.





## THE LITTLE BIRD

It was Seryozha's birthday, and he received many presents: tops, hobby-horses and picture books. But the best gift of all was from his uncle. It was a net for catching birds.

A little board was attached to a frame on which a net was stretched. Grain was sprinkled on the board, and then the net was set out in the yard. When a bird flew up and perched on the board, the board would turn over and the net would fall.

Seryozha was so happy he came running to his mother to show her his net.

His mother said, "It's not a nice toy at all. What do you want with little birds? Why do you want to torment them?"

"I'll put them in cages. They'll sing, and I'll feed them."

Seryozha got some grain, sprinkled it on the little board and set the net out in the garden. He stood next to it, waiting for birds to come flying down. But the birds were afraid of him and did not come near the net.

Seryozha went in to dinner and left the net in the garden. When he came to look at it after dinner he saw that the net had fallen and a little bird was thrashing about under it. Seryozha was very excited. He caught the bird and took it into the house.



“Look, Mamma! I’ve caught a bird. It must be a nightingale. Oh, how fast its heart is beating.”

His mother said, “It’s a siskin. Don’t torment it. Let it go.”

“No, I’ll feed it and care for it.”

Seryozha put the siskin in a cage, and for two days he fed it grain, changed its water and cleaned the cage. On the third day he forgot about the siskin and did not change its water.

Then his mother said to him, “See? You forgot all about your little bird. I think you had better let it go.”

"No, I won't forget. I'll give it some fresh water now and clean the cage."

Seryozha stuck his hand into the cage and began cleaning it, but the siskin became frightened and beat its wings against the cage. Seryozha cleaned the cage out and went for water.

His mother saw that he had forgotten to close the little door and called after him, "Close the cage door, Seryozha, or your bird might fly out and hurt itself."

No sooner had she said this than the siskin found the door, spread its wings happily and flew across the room to the window. But it did not see the glass pane. It hit the pane and fell to the windowsill.

Seryozha came running, picked up the little bird and took it back to the cage. The siskin was alive, but it lay on its breast with its little wings spread out and was breathing jerkily. Seryozha began to cry.

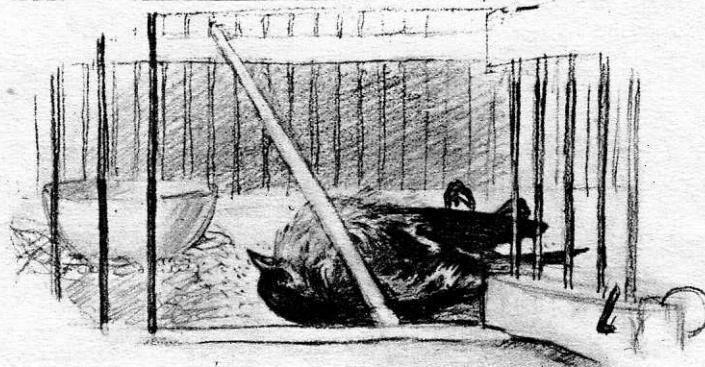
"Mamma! What'll I do?"

"There's nothing you can do now."

Seryozha did not leave the room that day. He kept gazing at the siskin. The siskin lay on its breast as before, breathing jerkily. When Seryozha went to bed that night the siskin was still alive. Seryozha could not fall asleep for a long while. No sooner would he close his eyes than he would imagine the siskin lying there, gasping for breath.

When Seryozha went up to the cage the next morning he saw the siskin lying on its back with its legs curled up. It was dead.

Never again did Seryozha catch another bird.





# THE LIAR

A shepherd boy was out with his flock. Once he decided to shout, as though he had seen a wolf, "Help! A wolf! A wolf! "

The village men came running and saw that he had tricked them. He did this two or three times more. Then it so happened that a wolf really did attack the flock.

The boy began to shout, "Come! Hurry! It's a wolf! "

The village men decided that he was tricking them again and paid no attention to him.

The wolf saw he need fear no one and killed the whole flock.





## TWO FRIENDS

Two friends were walking through the forest when a bear attacked them. One turned and fled. He climbed a tree and sat there, while the other remained on the road. There was nothing for him to do but fall to the ground and play dead.

The bear came up to him and sniffed. The man even stopped breathing.

The bear sniffed his face, decided he was dead and lumbered off.

When the bear was gone the other man climbed down and said with a smile, "What did the bear whisper in your ear?"

"It said that someone who deserts his friend in time of danger is not a good person at all."





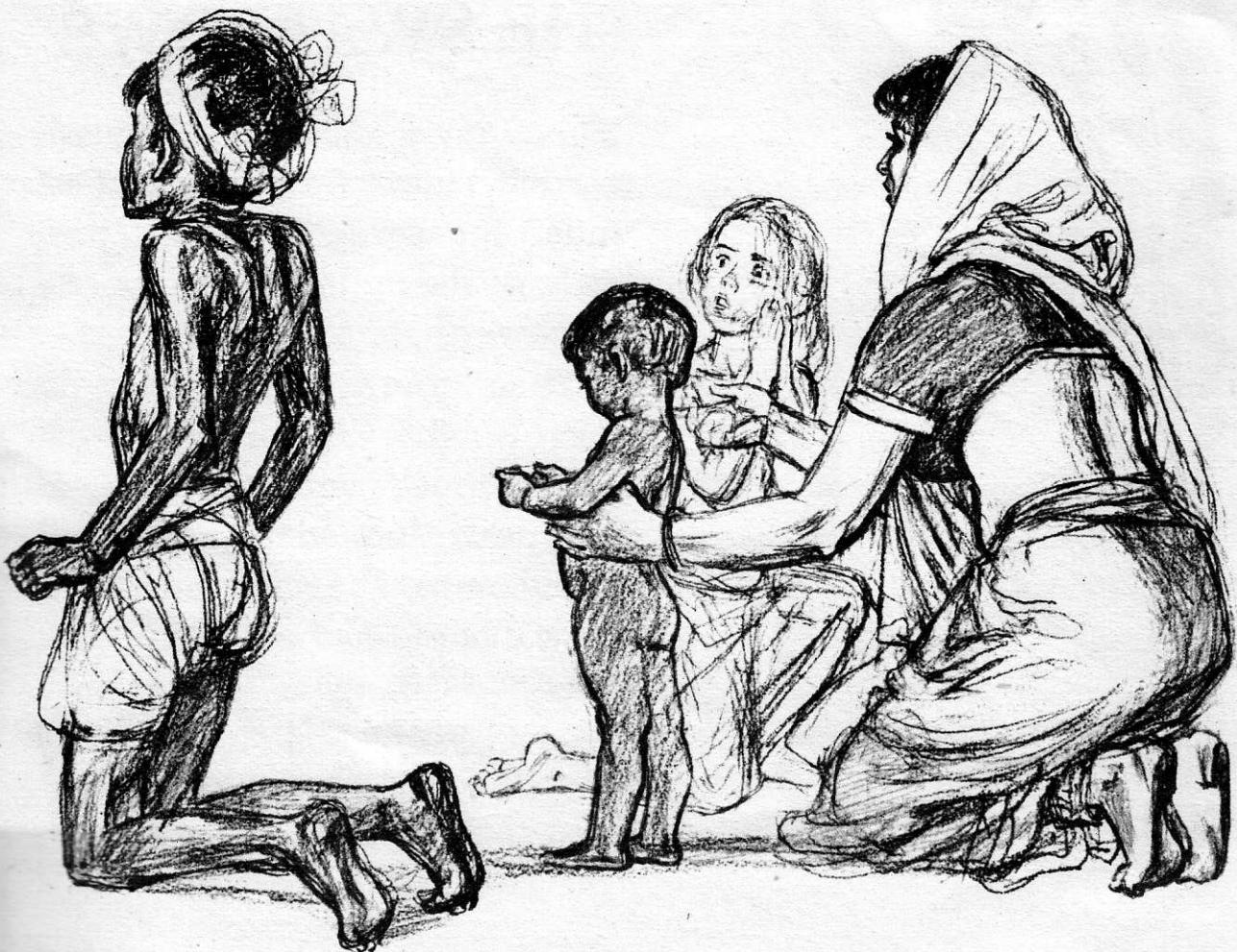
# THE SWAN

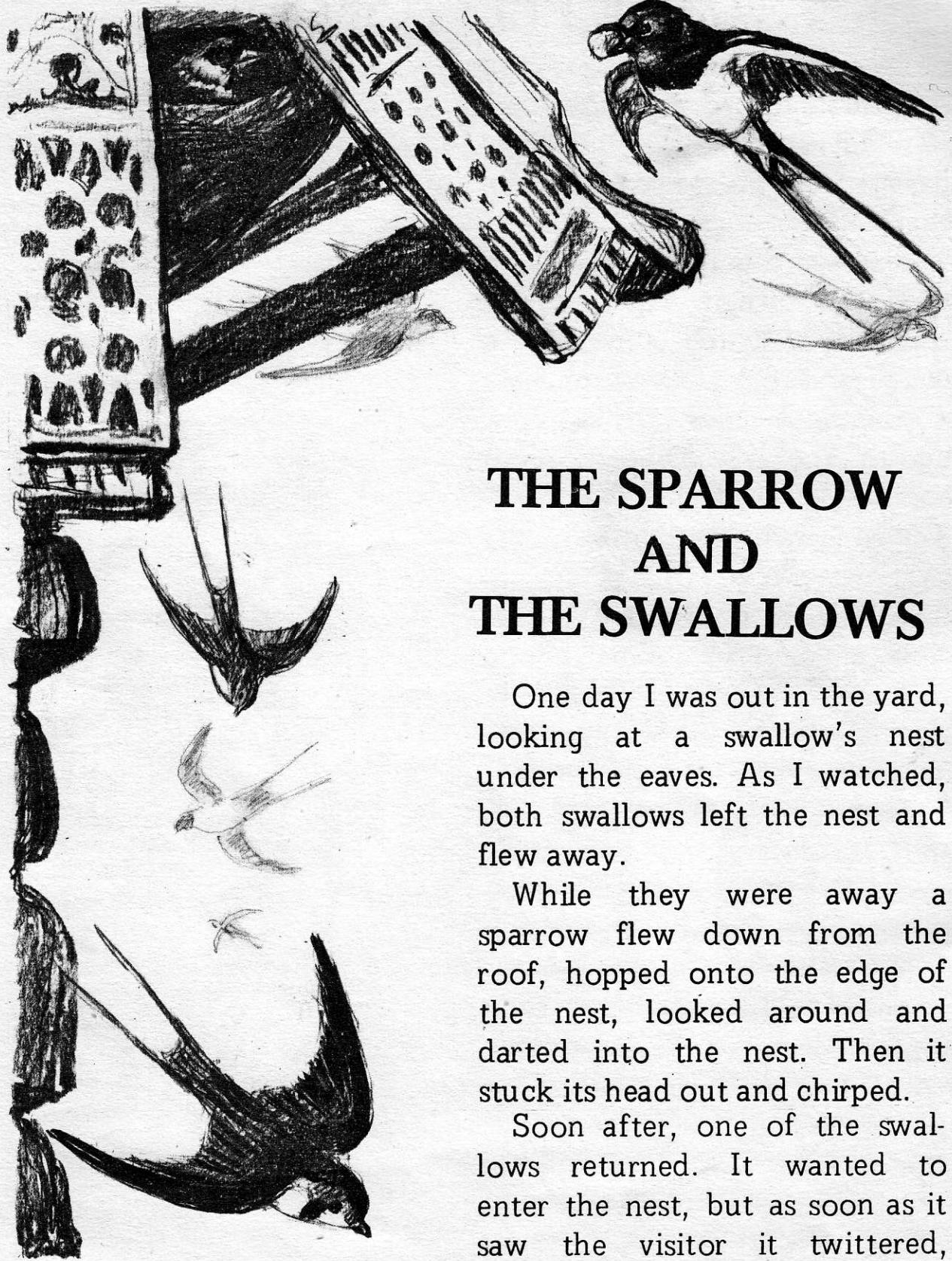
A flock of swans was flying south from the cold lands in the north. The swans were flying across the sea. They had flown over the water a day and a night, and a second day and a second night, never stopping to rest. There was a full moon in the sky. The swans could see the dark water far below. They were tired, yet they did not stop, but kept on flying. The old, strong swans led the way, with the younger and weaker ones following. A young swan was the last in line. Its strength was failing. It flapped its wings and felt it could not fly any farther. Then, spreading its wings, it sailed down, closer and closer to the water, while its comrades winged farther and farther away, becoming white spots in the moonlight. The swan settled on the water and folded its wings. The waves rocked it gently. Now the flock was like a tiny white streak in the light sky. The whistle of the swans' wings could barely be heard in the stillness. When they disappeared from view the swan threw back its neck and closed its eyes. It did not move. Only the sea, rising and falling, made the swan rise and dip as well. At dawn a light breeze rippled the water and some of it splashed against the swan's white breast. The swan opened its eyes. A red dawn was breaking in the east, while the moon and the stars had paled. The swan sighed, arched its neck, flapped its wings and rose up. Its wing-tips skimmed the water as it took to the air. The swan rose higher and higher, and when the water was far below it turned south, towards the warm lands. It flew on alone over the mysterious sea, following the direction its comrades had taken.



# THE ELEPHANT

A man owned an elephant. He did not feed it properly and made it work hard. One day the elephant became angry and stepped on its master. The man died. Then his wife began to weep. She brought her children out to where the elephant was and tossed them at its feet, saying: "Elephant! You have killed their father. Now kill them, too." The elephant looked at the children, raised the eldest boy in its trunk and gently sat him on its back. From then on the elephant obeyed the boy and worked for him.





## THE SPARROW AND THE SWALLOWS

One day I was out in the yard, looking at a swallow's nest under the eaves. As I watched, both swallows left the nest and flew away.

While they were away a sparrow flew down from the roof, hopped onto the edge of the nest, looked around and darted into the nest. Then it stuck its head out and chirped.

Soon after, one of the swallows returned. It wanted to enter the nest, but as soon as it saw the visitor it twittered, beat its wings and flew away.

The sparrow sat there, chirping.

All of a sudden a little flock of swallows appeared. Each swallow flew up to the nest, as though to have a look at the sparrow, and then flew off again.

The sparrow was not frightened. It turned its head this way and that and continued to chirp.

And again the swallows flew up to the nest, fussed about and flew off again.

There was a reason why the swallows were flying up to the nest: each brought a little glob of mud in its beak, and together they were gradually closing up the entrance to the nest.

Again and again they flew up and away, making the opening smaller and smaller as they added more and more mud to it.

At first, the sparrow's neck could be seen, then only its head, then its beak, and at last nothing at all could be seen. The swallows had closed it in the nest completely. Then they flew off and began circling over the house, whistling shrilly.





## THE SEA EAGLE

A sea eagle built its nest by a road far from the sea and hatched its young.

One day some people were working by the tree. The eagle came flying back to its nest, carrying a large fish in its talons. The people saw the fish, surrounded the tree and began to shout and throw stones at the eagle.

The eagle dropped the fish. A man picked it up and the people went off.

The eagle perched on the edge of the nest. Its fledgelings raised their heads and began to cheep. They were begging for food.

The eagle was weary and could not fly to the sea again. It settled on the nest, spread its wings over the fledgelings, caressed them, preened their feathers and seemed to be asking them to

wait a while. But the more it caressed them, the louder they cried.

Then the eagle flew off the nest and settled on the top branch of the tree.

The fledgelings cried still more piteously.

All of a sudden the eagle uttered a piercing cry, spread its wings and flew off heavily towards the sea.

It was far into the evening by the time the eagle returned. It was flying slowly and close to the ground. Once again it had a large fish in its talons.

When the eagle reached the tree it looked about to see whether there were not any people nearby again. Then it quickly folded its wings and perched on the edge of the nest.

The fledgelings raised their heads and opened their beaks, and the eagle tore the fish apart and fed its children.





# THE SHARK

Our ship was at anchor near the African Coast. It was a fine day, with a fresh breeze blowing from the sea, but towards evening the weather changed: it became very close. Hot air from the Sakhara was rushing towards us as from a hot oven.

Shortly before sunset the captain came out on the bridge and shouted: "You may go swimming!" In no time some sailors had jumped into the water, lowered a sail and made it fast, to serve as a swimming pool.

There were two boys on board the ship. The boys were the first to dive in, but they felt cramped in the sail and so decided to have a race in the open sea.

Both cut through the water like salamanders as they swam to the spot where a barrel bobbed above the anchor.

One boy overtook the other at first, but then dropped behind. His father, an old gunner, stood on deck, watching his son with pride. But when the boy lagged behind, his father shouted, "Come on, now!"

All of a sudden someone on deck shouted: "A shark!" There in the water we all saw the monster's fin.

The shark was heading straight for the boys.

"Back! Back! Turn back! It's a shark!" the gunner shouted. But the boys did not hear him. They swam on, laughing and shouting more loudly than before.

The gunner was as pale as a sheet as he stood there motionlessly, staring at the boys.

The sailors lowered a boat, jumped into it and bent to their



oars. The boat streaked towards the boys. However, they were still far away, while the shark was now within fifty feet of them.

At first, the boys did not hear the men shouting, nor did they see the shark. But then one of them looked back, and we all heard his shriek. The boys began swimming away from each other.

The shriek seemed to have awakened the gunner. He dashed towards the cannons. He pointed the barrel of one, crouched, sighted, and picked up the portfire.

Everyone on board the ship froze, waiting to see what would follow.

The cannon boomed. We saw the gunner fall beside it and bury his face in his hands. We could not see what had happened to the shark or to the boys, for smoke screened all.

However, when the smoke lifted over the water there was a murmur from all sides. It grew louder until, finally, a joyous shout went up.

The old gunner uncovered his face, rose and looked down at the sea.

The yellow belly of the dead shark bobbed on the waves. A few minutes later the rowboat reached the boys and brought them back to the ship.





## THE DIVE

A ship had sailed around the world and was returning home. It was a still day and everyone was on deck. A large monkey darted in and out among the crowd, amusing everyone. The monkey hopped, jumped, made funny faces and mimicked the people. One could see that it knew they enjoyed watching it, and this excited it still more.

The monkey jumped towards a twelve-year-old boy, the captain's son, tore his hat from his head, put it on and quickly scampered up the mast. Everyone laughed. The boy, now hatless, did not know whether to laugh or to cry.

The monkey sat down on the first yard, removed the hat and, using its hands and teeth, began tearing it. It seemed to be teasing the boy, pointing at him and making faces. The boy shook his fist at it and shouted, but this only made the monkey tear at the hat more viciously. The sailors laughed still louder, but the boy turned red, threw off his jacket and rushed up the mast after the monkey. In no time he had climbed the rigging to the first yard, but just as he was about to snatch his hat, the monkey, more nimble and quick than he, scampered higher.

"I'll get you!" the boy shouted and also climbed higher.

The monkey beckoned to him again and climbed higher yet, but the boy was so excited by now that he kept on after it. Thus, in no time, both the monkey and the boy reached the top of the mast. At the very top the monkey stretched out to its full length, grabbed hold of the rigging with the toes of one foot and hung the hat on the tip of the last yard. Then it climbed onto the top of the mast and bared its teeth in a happy grin. It was about four feet from the mast to the tip of the yard where the hat hung, and only by letting go of the rigging and the mast could it be reached.

But the boy was too excited. He let go of the mast and stepped out onto the yard. Everyone on deck had been watching and laughing at what had been going on between the monkey and the captain's son, but when they saw him let go of the rigging and place his foot on the yard, balancing with his outstretched arms, all stood still in terror.

Should he miss his step, he would fall to his death on deck. But even if he did not miss his step and reached the end of the yard and got his hat, it would be nearly impossible to turn



around and walk back to the mast. In silence everyone watched, waiting to see what would happen.

Suddenly someone on deck cried out in horror. The cry brought the boy to his senses. He looked down and began to teeter.

Just then his father, the captain, came out of his cabin. He had his gun on his arm, for he was going to shoot some gulls. He saw his son standing on the yard. In a flash he raised his gun, aimed at the boy and shouted:

“Into the water! Jump into the water this minute, or I’ll shoot you! ”

The boy teetered, but did not seem to understand.

“Jump, or I’ll shoot you! One, two...” and just as his father shouted “three! ”, the boy dived.

# THE LION AND THE DOG

Once a dog happened to get into a lion's cage in the Zoo. The dog tucked its tail between its legs and crouched in a corner of the cage. The lion went up to it and sniffed at it.

The dog rolled over on its back and wagged its tail.

The lion nudged it with its paw and rolled it over.

The dog jumped up and then stood on its hind legs.

The lion looked at the dog, cocked its head this way and that, and did not touch it.

When the keeper tossed the lion a chunk of meat, the lion tore off a piece and left it for the dog.

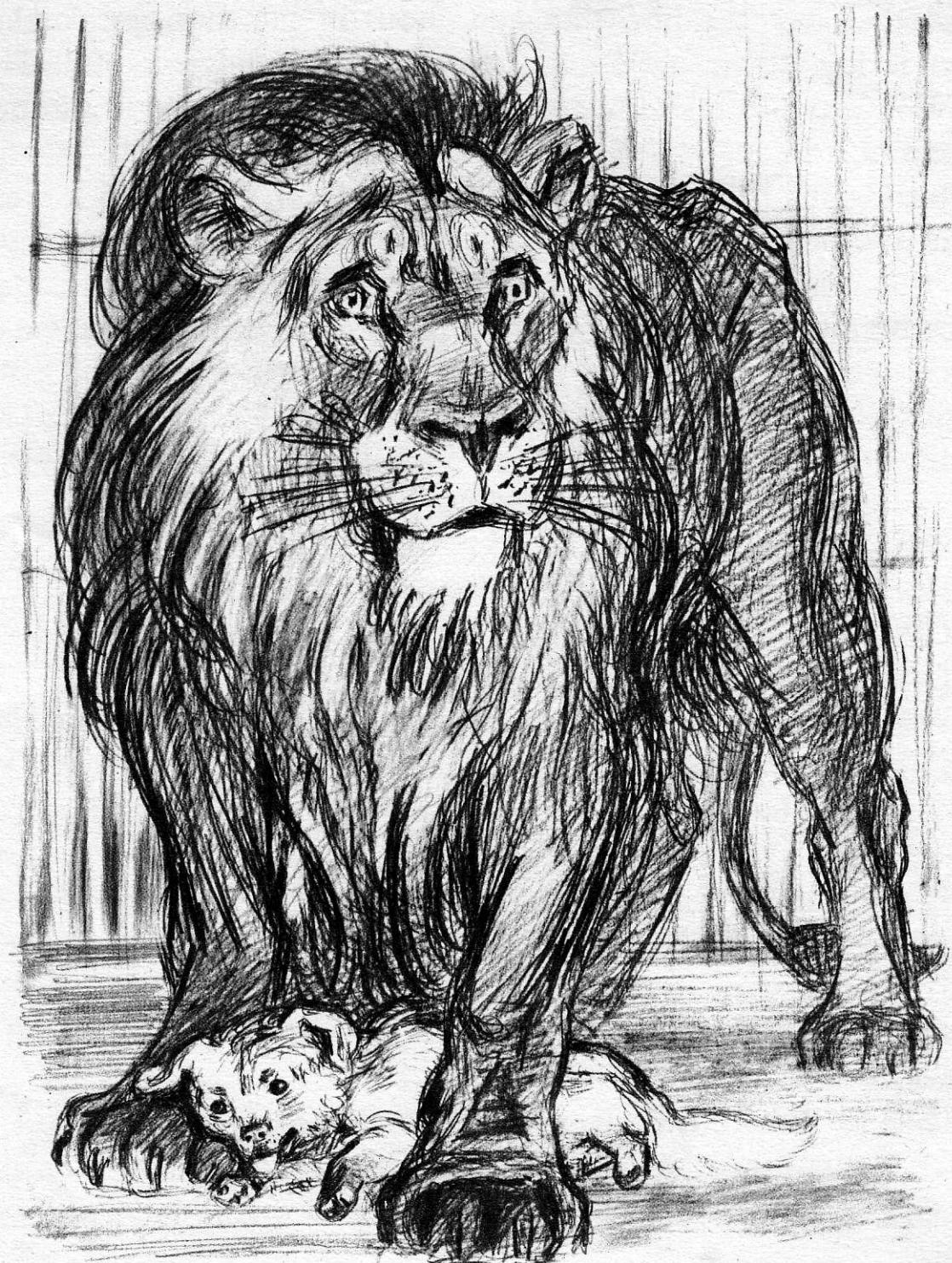
That evening, when the lion lay down to sleep, the dog lay down beside it and rested its head on the lion's paw.

From that day on the dog lived in the lion's cage. The lion acted friendly towards it. It slept beside the dog and sometimes played with it.

Thus the lion and the dog shared a cage for a whole year.

At the end of the year the dog took sick and died. The lion refused to eat. It sniffed at the dog, licked it and nudged it with its paw.

When the lion realised that the dog was dead it reared up, bristled, lashed its tail against its sides, rushed at the walls of the cage and gnawed at the lock and at the floorboards.



All that day the lion thrashed about in the cage and roared. Then it lay down beside the dead dog and became still. The keeper wanted to take the dead dog away; but the lion would not let him near it.

The keeper thought the lion would forget its loss if it were given another dog, and so another dog was let into the cage. But the lion rushed at it and killed it instantly. Then it lay down beside the dead dog, put its paws around it and remained thus for five days.

On the sixth day the lion died.

## CONTENTS

THE KITTEN .....	5
THE GIRL AND THE MUSHROOMS .....	10
THE PLUM PIT .....	13
THE LITTLE BIRD .....	15
THE LIAR .....	19
TWO FRIENDS .....	21
THE SWAN .....	23
THE ELEPHANT .....	25
THE SPARROW AND THE SWALLOWS .....	26
THE SEA EAGLE .....	28
THE SHARK .....	31
THE DIVE .....	35
THE LION AND THE DOG .....	39

